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# WHY CRIME DOES NOT PAY—

## Famous Robberies Where Fortunes in Diamonds Were the Lure That Led Thieves to Lay the Shrewdest Plans and Run the Most Desperate Risks



"Disguised as a sister of charity, I easily obtained permission to go through the house and gather up a basket of flowers for the hospital. But besides the flowers, my nimble fingers found time to take possession of many costly wedding gifts, which I carefully concealed in my basket of posies and in the folds of my black robe. Suddenly, just as I was picking up a magnificent diamond necklace, a detective stepped from behind a portiere and sternly asked what I was doing."

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**N**EXT to money, professional criminals regard diamonds as the most desirable loot of all.

Taken from their settings these stones are practically unidentifiable. Unless a stone is of unusual size or possesses some marked peculiarity, not even an expert would attempt to pick it out from half a dozen others of the same size with which it had been mingled.

For this reason, stolen diamonds may be disposed of with little or no risk. The burglar does not even have to sell them to a "fence" or professional receiver of stolen property, but may dispose of his booty in the wholesale jewelry district with impunity, unless, of course, for some reason or other it is necessary for him to keep under cover. Even then he can get one of his pals to dispose of the stones for him, or a "fence" will give him practically full value for them.

Then, too, diamonds appeal to the burglar because they are easily carried and secreted. There was a criminal named Charles Woodward who made a specialty of robbing jewelry stores. He was what is known as a "pennyweight" thief. "Pennyweights" usually operate in couples. They enter a jewelry store, ask to see some loose diamonds, and while one of them engages the attention of the clerk, the other snatches a stone from the tray and makes off with it. In the excitement of the pursuit which follows, the first "pennyweight" makes his escape.

Woodward earned the name of "Charlie the Diamond Swallow," because when caught he made a practice of actually swallowing his loot. Such a ruse would hardly be feasible with any other loot than diamonds.

Because diamonds are so highly regarded in the underworld, many of the brainiest and most resourceful professional criminals have devoted their efforts exclusively to the looting of jewelry stores and private houses where jewels in large quantities might be expected to be found.

Very large hauls have been made by these diamond robbers. Next to the robbing of banks, diamond robberies, perhaps, have netted professional criminals more than any other species of crime. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of precious stones have been secured in a single robbery. I have made several big hauls of this character myself, and I know scores of burglars who made a specialty of diamond robberies who were equally successful.

But even the diamond robber does not make his profession pay. What he gains by stealth and by the exercise of his ingenuity, he loses over the gaming table or in other forms of dissipation.

There was Dave Cummings for instance. He was one of the most "successful" burglars in the business. In the underworld, he was regarded as a prince of his trade and was the envy of all lesser lights. He divided his attention between jewelry stores and banks.

Down in New Orleans, by a very clever scheme, he succeeded in robbing the safe of Schooler's jewelry store and got away with \$100,000 worth of diamonds.

Dave's resourcefulness was well-illustrated in this case. The store was located in Canal street and the safe stood directly in front of a glass door, where it was in plain view of a watchman who made his rounds every hour.

The safe was of the burglar-proof va-

riety, and Dave figured that it would require at least two hours' work to get the best of it. For a week he studied the layout endeavoring to work out a plan by which he could get two hours' of uninterrupted work on the safe. At length, he solved the difficulty. Having gained an entrance to the place he rigged up a dummy safe in the rear of the store, waited until the watchman had made his hourly inspection and then carefully substituted the dummy safe for the real one. One hour later the watchman appeared upon the scene again and looked through the glass door, but he didn't suspect for a moment that the safe he saw was anything but what it appeared to be, and all the time Dave was busily engaged in the rear of the store cracking the real safe.

Cummings' loot amounted to \$100,000 in this case. Somewhat later he cracked the safe of the First National Bank of Quincy, Ill., and got away with \$539,000 in currency, bonds and other securities, and within the year he stole \$400,000 from the Falls City Bank of Louisville, Ky., not to mention anything of several minor diamond robberies he committed in addition. Yet all this enormous fortune, aggregating nearly two million dollars and accumulated within a little over two years, went the way of all ill-gotten gains. Wine, women and faro took it. Within a few months after the last of these big hauls was made Dave was absolutely "broke!"

If anyone imagines then that there is comfort or contentment to be gotten out of the proceeds of a life of crime, this experience of Dave Cummings and similar experiences of the hundreds of other "successful" criminals whose stories I am revealing ought to banish the delusion. No one could possibly be more "successful" in his business than these criminals were in theirs, and yet their lives pointed ever to the conclusion that CRIME DOES NOT PAY.

Weddings offer fine opportunities for diamond robbers. Many clever schemes are used to get access to the room where the wedding presents are displayed. I have engineered a number of these robberies, and we always got away without being detected, although we had many narrow escapes.

I had been reading the papers pretty closely in the hope of learning of some fashionable wedding which would answer my purpose. I saw my opportunity in the announcement of the coming wedding of the daughter of a very wealthy man. The ceremony was to be performed in their town house and the wedding presents, said to represent a fortune, would undoubtedly be placed on view for the edification of the guests. I knew that the father was very much interested in charitable works, and that, as was usual in such cases, the flowers and rare plants used to decorate the house would afterward be sent to some hospital or similar organization for the benefit of the inmates.

I followed the papers and read all I could find about this particular wedding. It was said that a well-known detective had been engaged to keep watch on the presents, owing to the fact that many additional waiters and servants would be on hand and every precaution was necessary to guard against thieves.

After the festivities are over and the bride and groom have left the house, it is customary in such cases for most of the detectives to go, only one or two remaining to keep an eye on the wedding presents until they have been safely deposited in the vaults.

That was the time I chose to descend

upon the house and make the haul I had in mind. I dressed myself up as a sister of charity and, taking an assistant with me, I called at the house in a cab. I asked for the father of the bride and stated that I had been sent by the hospital to ask for some of the flowers. Permission was at once given me to go through the house and select what I wanted.

It looked very simple. I went from floor to floor picking up flowers here and there and handing them to my assistant or to one of the servants to carry down to my waiting cab.

At length I came to the room where the gifts were displayed. I was astonished to find the unguarded, although there were one or two servants of the house constantly passing through. I picked up a pot or two of flowers, occasionally managing to get a piece of jewelry at the same time. Suddenly my eyes were attracted by a magnificent diamond necklace. I determined to include it in my loot, but there were no flowers near it, and I was at a loss for a moment to know how to get to it without arousing the suspicion of any one who happened to pass through the room.

I waited until I thought the room was empty and then walked boldly over to the table on which the necklace lay. I picked it up and was about to conceal it on my person when from behind a portiere a man whom I at once knew to be a detective stepped out and asked me

the metal had been battered I succeeded in disposing of the whole lot for \$35,000.

Some weeks ago I told of the bank robbery which I carried through at the request of the bank's president. He was over \$150,000 short in his accounts, and he conceived the plan of having his bank robbed in order to save his own skin.

Other kinds of business besides banks sometimes find it convenient to resort to similar practices.

A good many years ago a diamond merchant with a place of business on Maiden Lane called to see me and suggested that I go to his place some night and rob his safe. I said I would be glad to accommodate him provided he would pay the price. He was surprised at my mention of a price, and asked me why I wouldn't be satisfied with the proceeds of the robbery instead of expecting an advance payment.

I told him I would not consider the job at all unless he paid me fifteen thousand dollars in advance. He said that was entirely too much for such an easy job.

"Why, all you have to do," he declared, "is to get into my office, open the safe and clean up an easy fifteen thousand dollars worth of stones!"

Then I got up to go, but he called me back and at length agreed to my terms, although he offered me a check for the amount at first. Of course, I made him give me cash, and it was agreed that there were to be fifteen thousand dollars worth of jewels in the safe in addition. I then made him sign a statement setting forth our agreement and binding him to use his best efforts to secure our release in the event that we were caught. I was to return the agreement when all its terms had been complied with.

Within two weeks after our talk I had got together my little band of burglars and safe crackers and was in readiness for the job. We went into the building a little before closing hours in the afternoon and secreted ourselves until the doors had been locked.

About eleven o'clock I sent out one of my band to look around. A moment later I heard a terrible crash and a weak voice exclaiming: "Oh, don't kill me! Don't

the largest in the city at the time. The poor watchman was taken to the hospital, but he was sick more from his terror than from any injury we had inflicted on him. He gave the police a fanciful description of the robbers, but it was so far off from our real description that the police never connected us with the affair.

A few weeks after the matter had died down we sold the jewelry to a well known jeweller, who used to keep a place on Fourteenth street, and got four thousand for the diamonds, although they were worth ten thousand dollars.

Kelso was the Chief of Police at that time, and he sent down a crowd of detectives to look for the robbers. The owner of the store told the police he had lost several hundred thousand dollars worth of jewelry, and of course he went into bankruptcy, his creditors never knowing that he was the main thief and got most of the loot. He got into trouble and lost his money in Wall Street. Hence his desire for bankruptcy.

I had another experience with a jeweller who wanted a robbery perpetrated, but not on himself. A competitor of his had been paying too much attention to his wife, and he became jealous of her. He was anxious to ruin the jeweller who was making inroads into his peace of mind. He came to me for the job, and I politely turned him down. I had good reason at first for doubting his sincerity in making me the proposition, because I had myself robbed this jealous jeweller a few days before. He had an intuition that I robbed him, but he could not produce any proof. This was in St. Louis. I had met two old friends from New York City. They had designs upon a jewelry house and wanted me to go along with them. We went into the jewelry store of this jealous husband just to size things up, and the men with me had no intention of taking anything that day. But while they were talking with the proprietor I saw an opportunity to gather in some good looking pieces and accordingly took up a tray of diamonds without being noticed. The next day the papers had an account of the robbery and nobody seemed to know who the thieves were.



SOPHIE LYONS.

competitor. He said he had suffered a considerable loss, and it was only fair that his competitor should be placed on even terms with him. I was quite young at that time, and did not dare take up such a proposition as this, for I had found that when things are made easy for you there is something bad going to happen to you later on. So I would not take a chance with the diamond merchant. A year later I was back in St. Louis and learned the true state of affairs; how the competitor was flirting with this man's wife and how finally the whole matter went into the divorce court for adjustment. While I was there I met the jeweller, and he told me he would soon be free from his wife and asked me to marry him. I had to decline.

Some years ago when I was summering at Nice, I had an experience which afforded me a lot of satisfaction. I found out afterward that I had stolen a march on Mrs. Helen Gardner, alias Lady Temple, the notorious English swindler and confidence woman.

One of the fine jewelry shops for which this resort is famous had a diamond bracelet which I coveted more than I ever did any other piece of jewelry. It was a magnificent thing—but the price was entirely beyond my means. At last I decided that if I could not get it by fair means I would by foul.

One morning I was standing in this store pretending to be looking at some rings, but really watching for an opportunity to get my hands on that bracelet, when the woman who later proved to be Mrs. Gardner, alias Lady Temple, entered. She was a tall, beautiful brunette—gowned in the most expensive fashion.

I was attracted not only by her striking appearance but also by the sly way she had of taking everything in from the corners of her eyes without seeming to be looking. This, and some other familiar mannerisms made me jump to the conclusion that she was either a high-class thief or a detective.

This woman took up a position just behind me, and, although I could not see her, something told me that she was watching my every movement with more than passing interest. I was just on the point of abandoning my plans for the bracelet when, to my great relief, she finished her errand and left the store. As the door closed behind her my long awaited opportunity came. The saleswoman who was showing me the rings was called away for a minute, leaving me all alone in the front of the store.

He had carelessly left the showcase open. There in full view lay the bracelet—the bracelet for which my fingers fairly itched! Could I reach it?

There was not a second to lose. I raised myself on tiptoe, bent my body forward over the broad showcase and reached my right hand down into the opening at the back. By stretching my arm until the muscles ached my fingers barely touched the bracelet.

Another mighty stretch, and my hand closed over it. More quickly than it takes to tell I drew my arm back and hid the precious plunder in my sleeve. I was not an instant too soon, for the saleswoman returned before I fairly had time to resume the normal attitude of an honest customer.

I was so excited and jubilant that I felt like running all the way to the hotel. The bracelet was easily worth \$5,000, and I knew that the minute its loss was discovered there would be a great hue and cry. So I hid the costly trinket in a jar of face cream and prepared to seclude myself in my room under pretense of sickness until the excitement had time to blow over.

To my delight no detectives came to disturb my solitude and the only news I got of the robbery was from the long accounts the newspapers printed. Soon I thought it safe to recover my health and go out again. On the first day I ventured downstairs whom should I meet in the hotel parlors but the same woman I had seen in the jewelry store.

My guilty knowledge of that bracelet in the cold cream jar upstairs made me inclined to avoid her. She, however, plainly showed her anxiety to make my acquaintance, and at the first opportunity fairly forced a conversation. I soon saw that she was no detective, but just who she was—where she got her money and what she was doing at Nice—long remained a mystery to me.

But although diamond robberies frequently net big returns, even the most expert professional criminals who have followed this line of work have invariably found that their success is short-lived—and that CRIME DOES NOT PAY.

SOPHIE LYONS.



"What's the matter?" Dave demanded angrily. "Are we going to rob this store or are you going to turn nurse and hold that watchman's broken head all night?"

what I was doing.

I retained my self-possession. "What a terrible waste of money!" I exclaimed, holding out the necklace at arm's length. "These vain baubles must be worth thousands of dollars, I suppose, and here they lie idly on this table. How many lives the wealth they represent might save! How much misery and suffering it might avert!"

The detective gave me a searching glance and then, as I lay the necklace down again, he crossed himself, put his hand in his pocket and gave me a quarter as if to atone for what he considered his unjust suspicions of me!

I continued my trip through the room, gathering flowers and jewels wherever I could lay my hands on them, for the detective, his suspicions completely disarmed, was no longer to be feared, and as I passed the table on which the necklace lay I succeeded in getting my hands on it again and concealing it among the armful of flowers I carried. Then I made my way to the cab and drove off.

Once in my room I quickly disposed of the flowers and set to work preparing the jewelry for sale to a "fence." The stuff was worth fully \$50,000. After all the stones were out of their settings and

kill me!" There was the sound of another heavy blow and then all was quiet.

I went out to see what the trouble was. On the floor outside the private office where the safe was located lay the inert body of a watchman. Blood was streaming from his head, and Dave, the burglar, I had sent out to look around, stood over him with a blackjack in his hand. I knelt beside him and felt his pulse, but it seemed to have stopped.

"What's the matter, Sophie?" demanded Dave angrily. "Have you grown chicken-hearted? Are we going to crack this box, or are you going to turn nurse and hold that man's head all night?"

At length I detected signs of life in the prostrate watchman, but I wouldn't leave him and made the others go on with the job without me.

They worked on the safe for two hours or so and finally got into it. They took out everything of value and we then skipped out. As I left the floor I threw a pail of water over the unconscious watchman, and was relieved to see him gather himself together as we made our way out of the building.

The next day of course there was a tremendous excitement over the robbery of this jewelry house, which was one of

The two men were surprised at this because it naturally put them off in their work, and they were inclined to suspect me. But I convinced them that I could not have taken the diamonds and they quickly left town in disgust. The jeweller had told about the visit of the woman to his store and I was hunted up and taken to the station.

The diamonds of course were not found on me or in my apartment, because I had already hidden them safely, and the police had to let me go.

A few days after this a rap came to my door in the evening and a nicely dressed young man asked permission to come into my room. I did not know who he was, and told him I could not permit such a thing; I had been put out of a hotel in another city because I allowed men to visit my room, and I did not want to have the same thing happen here. The young man went off, and a few days later I left St. Louis. A month later I met this young man in Chicago and he came up to me and bowed. He said he was the owner of the jewelry store that had been robbed, and after a little round about talk he asked me to go back with him to St. Louis. I asked him what he wanted that for, and he then suggested that I rob his